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THE DRAGONS
OF MALAYSIA
UNLEASHED!

MALAYSIA'S NEWS
MARKET NOW GETS
INTERNATIONAL BOOST

REMEMBER DIGI'S
YELLOW MAN?

HOW OSIM BRINGS
BRAND LOVE HOME

NEW BREED OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING: HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS

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CONTAGIOUS MALAYSIA

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CONTAGIOUS MALAYSIA: VIRAL EVOLUTION

Quick medical fact, Viremia is the medical term for when viruses enter the bloodstream. These parasitic viruses depend on a host for their very survival. They can be highly contagious and work by hiding from the immune system, taking over host cells and forcing them to produce more of the virus. But in the case of Contagious Malaysia, once you work with them, it's an addictive virus you'd never want to cure.

"Symptoms Non-Fatal, No Known Cure, but it's Contagious."

Surej Kumar
Founder, Contagious Malaysia

WITH social and digital media, and the explosion of communication channels, the promise of turbulence has arrived. With this turbulence, a significant change in the event management industry has arrived.

What follows is an interview with event management hybrid professional, Surej Kumar, the founder of Contagious Malaysia.

This clearly passionate man has been in the industry for 20 years and worked with multiple clients such as Celcom, Shell, Malaysia Airlines, and more.

He has event management running in his blood, and he organised his first ever event at the young age of 14, a Valentine's dance party for over 200 people.

Passion drove him far and wide in the industry and he eventually became the Head of Production for Beyond DDB Events.

In 2005 he set up Contagious Malaysia, and has never looked back since...

Why Contagious of all names?

I wanted to start a company which would grow organically and to put it simply, we are like a virus. Once you work with us, you would never want to go back. Hence our tagline: "Symptoms None-Fatal, No Known Cure but it's Contagious."

What are the challenging factors in your industry?

The first thing that comes to mind would be the economy. It has really changed from the old days. Now, tighter restrictions are placed for certain brands. Advertising revenue has seen a massive drop and there is a noticeable struggle. When there is a drop in demand but supply is plentiful, the competitive need for business gets fierce. To combat this, advertising companies would drop prices since it is a 'buyer's market'. Ultimately, due to the price factor, quality and creativity take a back seat.

What is your hiring process?

I come from an experience-based background (from the ground up) and I've always had a passion for this industry, so I would make it a point to ask candidates why they choose to enter this painstaking industry.

80% of the candidates would come forth with typical answers like 'the opportunity of meeting different people and to travel'. Obviously, they are looking at the perks of what the industry can offer them. Less than 20% would



Event Fine-Tuners in action!

tell me it is their sincere passion to join this industry.

I would tell the candidates that before you get a shot at travelling and meeting different people, there's a lot of hardship and competitiveness in the industry.

You need to get your hands dirty, project a sense of passion and leadership. Each candidate would receive an on-the-spot assignment from me on coming up with campaign ideas because that is how our industry works. Brief today, and the idea would be expected tomorrow, that's how demanding it is.

To many, an event is just something pieced together. Truth is, the event is just one part of the journey; the journey before and after is equally important. I understand that it's not easy for fresh graduates who are new to the industry, but that thought

process needs to be instilled.

Why is Contagious unique?

Contagious is one activation company where you can tell us what your challenges are and we will go seek out the solutions. We go beyond your 360 marketing ecosystem. Give us the objective and we will come up with ideas within the brand guidelines.

That is why we have multiple brands and agencies working with us, like Affin Bank, Celcom, Malaysia Airlines, Hong Leong Bank, DRB Hicom, Herbalife, Lafarge, Honda, TIME, M&CSaatchi, FCB, Naga DDB, TBWA, Phar Partnerships and more...

We have worked on many activations campaigns with clients for Yonder Music, Boost, Cadbury, Xpax Prepaid and Youth Fest, Microsoft, and the FIFA World Cup from 2006 till 2018.

We are known for executing events such as the KLIA 2 launch, MAS Boeing 737 launch, 11Street launch, MIX radio, MTV, and Celcom's 25th anniversary.

What's in the pipeline?

We have been working with a client to embark on Esports. We have prepared venues, talents, logistics and campaign plans for this project. This is truly a huge industry and there are plenty of opportunities for companies to be a part of this. We are able to do holistic campaigns for Esports!

Rate card?

Unlike others, our rates are not fixed. They are modular and customised to client needs.

Are you affiliated with any global partner in your space?

Many claim they have

partners around the world, but they really don't go around and get involved in on-ground events.

We do have an arm in Melbourne called Contagious Australia and by working with our friends from different agencies, we make it a point to get our hands dirty and ensure everything is seamless from start to finish.

In other words, you're bound to see our faces everywhere!

You want to train people?

Besides concentrating on the business side of things, I'd really like to contribute my share to the industry because in 10 years time, I would like to see this industry soaring to greater heights. The key is talent.

I would like to contribute to colleges, to get the students well trained and be mentally ready for the industry.



... WE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH A CLIENT TO EMBARK ON ESPORTS. THIS IS A HUGE INDUSTRY WITH PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMPANIES TO BE A PART OF. WE ARE NOW ABLE TO DO HOLISTIC CAMPAIGNS FOR ESPORTS!...

My interns have done their fair share of impressive work during their working experience with us.

How do you come up with ideas for activation?

First, we would need to understand the objective of the event. Two, we need to get down and dirty with the research work. An example would be working with a tyre company who wants to launch a brand new product. By finding out what makes the tyre special, we need to paint a picture about how amazing the product is. That way, consumers can experience the message of the product in all its glory.

What skills do you need to be in this industry?

You have got to be a Jack of all trades when it comes to storytelling, and most importantly

share a passion for the client's product.

If you work on a campaign just for the sake of completing the job, it will be really difficult to be on the same wavelength with the client.

Without the passion, it's tough to thrive in this industry. If you meet event professionals and ask what gives them satisfaction, they would tell you it is right at the end of the event when the client expresses gratitude.

I believe that's the ultimate 'carrot' we are looking for at the end of the day.

Where is Contagious heading next?

With the digital trend settling in, Contagious Malaysia has evolved into a hybrid model. By being an old school event agency, we can execute any

event whether small or big. We had the massive undertaking of launching KLIA 2. By being such a hardcore, old school event management company, we were able to fine tune the execution.

Now, our clients want to have engagement, ROI and have exposure in the digital media. One of the assignments we did was for Yonder Music. We had partners come up with apps, augmented reality applications and more.

By applying ourselves to a 360 marketing ecosystem, an event is no longer the main challenge but one of the components involved.

Would you consider working closely with competitors?

Back in the day, you could sit with your competitor and share your sorrows. It was good, since we knew which clients or

suppliers were taking us for a ride.

But as time passed on and businesses struggled to grow, the industry is no longer as intelligent or open as before.

An example of an industry body working together would be the 4A's. However in our industry, everyone is on their own.

Are your industry players committed to protect your respective ideas and IPs?

Nope. There is an association where you are able to register your ideas but it's not working, and there are many cases out where clients have taken ideas and sent it to different agencies for a cheaper price.

Do you see the new government playing a role in your industry?

I believe people expected

quick deliveries and results when the new government won. I personally think they need time because they have to realign a lot of matters.

However, the process is now cleaner and more organised.

Before this, if a Minister was involved in an event - the protocol drained everyone. Now, the pressure is lifted a little bit and things are less tense.

Have you ever wondered why a different strain of flu virus comes around every year? Scientists have long confirmed that viruses are constantly evolving, adapting faster than their hosts.

Contagious Malaysia is taking on evolution by becoming a Hybrid Activation Agency. An old school event agency with a twist, a new age activation specialist.